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The Present Crisis

AP

IN THE WORK OF

THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY.

AN ADDRESS

BY

BISHOP WM. R. NICHOLSON, D. D.,

DELIVERED IN WASHINGTON, D. C.,

AT THE

SIXTY-FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING

OF

The American Colonization Society,

January 17th, 1882.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

WASHINGTON CITY:
COLONIZATION BUILDING, 450 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE,
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ADDRESS.

It is an old proverb, Man's extremity is God's opportunity. There might well be another proverb—God's opportunity is man's urgency. When special movements of Divine Providence are abroad in the earth, it is then our duty and interest to take observations, to heed warnings, to catch inspiration, to act with promptness. A grand movement of God, specially apparent at this time, is the solving the problem by the logic of events, of the destiny of our freedmen, and, concomitantly, the opening up of Africa to the light of Christianity, the interests of commerce, and the development of civilization. God's opportunity is man's urgency. Never were the claims of the American Colonization Society to the devoted support of the friends of the Gospel and of human amelioration so enforced as now by those Almighty influences, which seem to enter, at chosen junctures, with wondrous effect into the affairs of men; and never so inspiring has been the sublime hopefulness of its work. Our duty is plain; our zeal should catch fire, our courage become transcendent.

There are tides in the affairs of men. Impulses—strange, unexpected, contagious, enthusiastic—take their rise from time to time in great masses of men, and bear right onward to glorious consummation many a rich freightage of human weal. Individual men, it is true, by heroic patience, and persistent effort, and a determined stand for principle, may do much, especially in the way of getting a people ready for the flow of the tide, whenever that may be; but it is only when the tide does flow, when great numbers of men are stirred at the same moment and uplifted by the same thoughts, that, as regards any far-reaching social movement, triumphant success is achieved. History teems with examples, and with reference to such crises in affairs we are accustomed to say, "The times were ripe." When Luther began to preach the distinctive doctrines of the great Reformation, how many evangelical workers for truth and righteousness had already appeared and had exhausted themselves? In the Providence of God they had been gradually making ready, in many lands, for the grand outburst of a gospel enthusiasm of nations. It is not that Luther, simply as Luther, exerted so tremendous an in-

fluence; he was just the mouthpiece of millions behind him, and it was to their thoughts and feelings he gave voice. When the tea was pitched over-board in Boston harbor, the thirteen colonies trembled in sympathy from Massachusetts to the Carolinas. A pebble, as by the finger of God, was let fall into the sea of a new nationality, and lo! what concentric waves of feeling, one after another, larger and larger, spreading over the entire surface of the waters, and only ceasing to spread when had been reached the solid shores of American Independence.

There are tides in human affairs, and happy they who are appointed to float their work upon the flood of a wide-spread interest. Others may have preceded them—must have preceded them—toiling in secret and in quiet, toiling in the midst and in spite of opposition, preparing for the auspicious moment, laying broad and deep the foundations of a people's concerted action; but it is only when the people's outburst of convictions shall have come, that the sweets of assured success are tasted and enjoyed.

We have arrived, I think, at one of such junctures in the history of God's providence, for, as I judge of it, the American Colonization Society is just now in the act of cresting the wave. For more than sixty years it has been a persistent, courageous, far-seeing worker in one of the holiest causes that were ever endeared to the human heart. Its little band of clear-thinking, determined, philanthropic men have gone on tugging against the lethargic indifference well nigh everywhere prevailing for many long years, and in some instances, against fiercest opposition; at the same time disseminating seed-thoughts, keeping their work aloft in the view of all, working out some most important successes, making ready for God's chosen moment in the future. And now, at length, underneath our finger's ends, are the quickening pulses of an epidemic of interest. Events in quick succession have riveted attention to this form of Christian philanthropy; meanwhile these arguments of God's Providence are multiplying, and are such as may be felt. Accordingly, susceptibility of impression as regards the excellence and the grandeur of colonization, now already widely existent, is evidently extending, and, as regards the commercial possibilities of its future, even selfishness is beginning to thrill with desire. The Society is standing to-day at the threshold of another and grander stage of its work.

This is no exaggeration. Let the facts speak for themselves. In order to this, and in illustration of what I regard as the present crisis in the work of the American Colonization Society, I proceed to pass in brief review the remarkable concurrence of circumstances in the midst of which its work must now be done.

First, we have in our country, 4,000,000 freedmen. These persons, formerly slaves under our laws, have recently been made, by our own act as a sovereign people, our fellow-citizens. This is, in itself, a prodigious fact.

But these persons are of a peculiar race, and between them and the dominant race of this country a great gulf is fixed. True, they are equal with ourselves before the laws of the land, which is as it should be; but they are not equal with ourselves in the courts of sentiment and custom—imperious courts, whose domineering decrees are iron-clad, and from them there is practically no appeal. The black man is here under social disabilities. He is not admitted into Anglo-Saxon society. He belongs to a hereditary caste. His very existence is a reminder of social inferiority. His sphere of action is one of fixed and hopeless subordination. Individuals among them may achieve greatness, nevertheless, the dominant sentiment of our country is evermore saying, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further. These disabilities are an incubus on his spirits, a nightmare to his motions, a burden crushing his energies, a drag obstructing his progress. He has no fair field of personal development. Intellectually he may expand, but socially he cannot rise. Here he is doomed to grovel. This is a fact yet more prodigious.

Can this fact fail to move the sensibilities of all thoughtful, benevolent Christian people? Time was when, amid the entangling alliances of prejudice engendered by slavery, so many minds among us were unable, sympathetically, to estimate this inevitable social depression of a freedman; but now that such prejudices have passed away, must not those other prejudices (call them such, if you please) in which is grounded the social ostracism of the free Negro, be regarded as creating a necessity for something more being done (if that be possible) in behalf of those whom we have set free? That high appreciation of a man's moral worth which has prompted the American people to rejoice at the enfranchisement of these millions of human souls—can it fail to be the motive power of whatever further efforts may be practicable for securing to our freedmen more favorable circumstances of personal and social well-being? It is impossible that the sacredness of this obligation should not be recognized. It is recognized. We hear it announced in private conversations; we see it announced in the newspaper press. Thousands of hearts are this day palpitating with it.

Nor are the freedmen themselves insensible to the disabilities of their situation. They feel the fact of their banishment from Anglo-Saxon social life. They are galled by the fetters of caste. They as-

pire to be citizens of a realm of social equality. Accordingly, where as during the sixty and odd years past the Colonization Society has sent only about 15,000 free colored persons to Africa, there are to-day 200,000 knocking at its door for the privilege of passing thither. The 4,000,000 may not all be willing to go, it is not to be expected, nor would we for an instant abridge their liberty of choosing their own home.

Hundreds of thousands there are, however, who are fast getting ready for this exchange of countries. And it must be so. For their race distinction, while barring them out from social equality here, has inevitably the effect to make them a solidarity by the cementing power of a sense of race integrity; and while race devotedness is an instinct of nature, race supremacy is the divinely allotted sphere of untrammeled personal improvement. Therefore it is that their destination is Africa. And they must feel it to be so more and more. Meanwhile these yearnings of theirs for a country of their own cannot but awaken the benevolent sympathies of the American people.

Now what a fact to have continually before us is this of our 4,000,000 freedmen! In the presence of so prodigious a fact, must it not be that the cause of colonization shall loom up—is looming up in grandest proportions of influence and success?

Secondly, on the other hand, we see that Africa is waiting for them. They are themselves restless and yearning for a country of their own, and now the country of their own is ready to receive them. It *is* their own country; allotted to them by a divine arrangement "when the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance." Their fathers were violently torn from it and imported into slavery, and these, their liberated descendants, exiles from the ancestral home, may have the satisfaction of knowing that fatherland has indeed been kept for them.

Not that Africa is without inhabitants, and in this sense is waiting for the return of the exiles. It has never been depopulated, and to-day more than 200,000,000 souls tenant its vast plains, the shores of its great rivers, its mountains and valleys. But it is in this, its very populousness, that the waiting of the dark continent for our freedmen is seen to be a manifest truth. A great work is waiting to be done for Africa's dense population, a work of Christian enlightenment and civilization, and only such as our freedmen can do that work. For Africa has barred her doors against the white man. He cannot live there. Roman Catholic missionaries tried it for two hundred and fourteen years, and have not left a vestige of their influ-

ence behind. Moravians, beginning in 1736, tried it for thirty-four years, making five attempts, at a cost of eleven lives, and did nothing. Englishmen tried it in 1792 for two years at Bulama Island, with the loss of a hundred lives. The London, Edinburgh and Glasgow Societies tried it in 1797, but their stations were extinct in three years, and five or six missionaries dead. Many other missionary attempts were made before the settlement of Liberia, all of which failed. Several Protestant missions there are now in Liberia which have done a good work, but it has been at the cost of many lives. The white man cannot live and labor there. And it is a remarkable fact that only infinitesimal portions of that mighty continent are owned by the white man. To the black man himself falls the stupendous work of redeeming his own country. Evidently, however, this work cannot be done by the heathen and the Mohammedans, between whom mainly its teeming population is divided. The workers must be imported back there. Importations have been made into Sierra Leone by our English friends, and the results, both as to Christianity and civilization, have been glorious. And importations have been made by the American Colonization Society with like encouraging results; but all this is only "a drop in the bucket." Hundreds of thousands of these colored missionaries of a continent's redemption would find more than enough to do in so vast an enterprise. Thus it is that their own country is now waiting for our freedmen.

For where shall such needed workers come from? As Dr. Blyden has said; they cannot be sent from Martinique and Guadalupe, from Barbadoes, Jamaica and Antigua, since to deplete those Islands would be to destroy them. No they must be sent from the United States. A mighty host they are, foot-loose, mind-free, and needing Africa as Africa needs them.

Behold, then, the complex adaptations of God's Providence. On the one hand the freedmen's call and Africa's answer, and on the other hand, Africa's call and the freedmen's answer; meanwhile the Colonization Society, like a living telegraph, transmitting hither and thither the double call and the double answer.

Thirdly. And now there stands Liberia. Not only is fatherland waiting for them, but a definite home in fatherland has been specially provided for their reception. It is as if the ideas and customs and living with which our freedmen have here grown familiar—in a word, as if their experiences here had been lifted bodily, and wasted thither upon the winds of the Atlantic. To the returning freedman, as for the first time he plants his feet upon the

strange strand of his as yet unfamiliar fatherland, the circumstances of Liberia are already vocal with his own familiar joys, and shout him a grateful home welcome, in the new career on which he has entered.

The origination of Liberia is due to the philanthropic statesmanship of the United States Government, under President Monroe in connection with the benevolence, and wisdom, and heroic persistence of the American Colonization Society; while mainly from the latter, among whose members in the past we are proud to pronounce the names of Henry Clay, President Monroe, Bishop Meade of Virginia, and others of like eminence, has come the fostering care, which has brought it through sixty years to its present strength and prosperity. It is the localization in Africa of a body politic of the freedmen from this country. It is a Republic modeled after that of the United States, with whose nomenclature and functions they are familiar. It is an established government, an independent State, and is now recognized as such by all the great nationalities of Christendom. It is a territory of 600 miles of sea-coast by some hundreds of breadth, secured first by honest payment, then won by the hard work of the Colonists from "the sinewy boar and the stealthy leopard," and won again by their skill and heroic bravery from the yell of the perfidious and murderous savage, whose lands are among the richest and best on the continent, and whose many valuable productions are inviting, and maintaining an ever increasing commerce.

Liberia is now a beacon light in the darkness of Africa. Her fifty or sixty churches, her earnest clergymen, her common schools and high school and college, the acknowledged scholarship of some of her prominent men, her legislative assemblies, her courts of justice, her able officers, her protection by law of person and property. These all are her glory. Her usages of society she has taken from ourselves. Her comforts of life are those which we are accustomed to enjoy. And already she has made herself felt as a power in the world, for the slave barracoons she has swept away, and the slave trade she has abolished from the whole length of her coast, and even the domestic slavery in the native tribes of her territory she has entirely suppressed. Her twenty thousand citizen freedmen have made the authority of her laws supreme over a million native Negroes, besides bringing over 200,000 of them under the elevating influences of her institutions. In fine, she is Christian, enlightened, civilized, Americanized.

This is Liberia, as she stands, with outstretched hands, to welcome back the returning children of Africa. And yet, hardly more than twenty thousand freedmen are counted within her borders. Just im-

agine one hundred thousand of our four millions to be domiciled in that sovereign State. What an accession of strength. What would be the impetus of development, the enthusiasm of purpose and hope, the victorious march of a beneficent power, through many a dusky tribe of the swarming interior.

Fourthly—We have before us the significant fact that the world's knowledge of Africa has been recently so very much enlarged. What a locked-up region of the earth it has always been. Geographers have known next to nothing of the contents of its immensity. Now, however, the map-maker is able to dot the surface of Africa with forests, and rivers, and lakes, and towns, and cities, in such profusion as would have been regarded as fabulous twenty years ago. But the very surprising thing is, that the most of these recent additions to our geographical knowledge have come about since the date of President Lincoln's signature to the decree of Emancipation. Simultaneously with the liberation of the millions of slaves in this country, the work of exploring Africa, and of making the world acquainted with its hidden interior, has seemed to spring forward as by a new inspiration, and now the long-kept secrets of that repellent continent are being revealed. Just as the pressing need of further knowledge was coming to be felt, a furor of discovery took possession of certain daring spirits in different parts of Christendom, and behold! the geographical enigma of the world lies unfolded to the gaze of mankind. We see how charming a country is the hitherto great unknown, and that an increased power of attractiveness is being brought to bear upon the sensibilities of Anglo-Saxon and Negro alike. Is not this a striking conjunction of affairs? Is it not the voice of God well-nigh made audible? Is He not saying to us, Africa is gloriously worthy of your best endeavors? and to the freedmen, Go forward with haste?

Thus have we passed in rapid review that remarkable concurrence of circumstances, to which I have referred as at this juncture rendering so forceful the interests of colonization. The four millions of freedmen in our land—the waiting of Africa for their return—the home-like Liberia—the vast enchanting improvements in the geography of Africa within the time elapsed since our abolition of slavery—in these four facts we have the present glorious crisis in the work of this Society. Perhaps I might add, that if the United States Government were a little more pronounced in its kindly offices toward Liberia, its own offspring, but little would remain to be desired as regards the present advantages of the cause of colonization. Not that we would have our Government depart from its traditions in its non-interference in the affairs of other governments, but in the well-

chosen words of Commodore Shufeldt, "A friendly note to a friendly Power, simply indicating that we take an active interest in Liberia, and would not be willing to see her territory curtailed or her trade restricted, and the occasional visit of an American man-of-war to indicate to the tribes within Liberian boundaries that the laws of Liberia must be respected;" that were all to be desired. It were a sublime expression of the moral sense of this Government; and politically justifiable by the fact of its original interests in Liberia, by the enormous debt this country owes to her freedmen, and by the dawning prospects of the commercial prosperity of our intercourse with that rich and growing State. Aside from this, however, and looking at the remarkable concurrence of circumstances actually existing, can it be doubted that the work of this Society is now more needed than ever, and, in fact, that it may now take at the flood a grand tidal wave of God's gracious Providence? What magnificent auspices under which to carry on a great work of Christian philanthropy. What a series of calls and answers—Providential reciprocities, Divine adaptations; day unto day uttering speech, night unto night showing knowledge. God's opportunity is man's urgency; and hope, and courage, and enthusiasm should inspire our efforts.

But that wonderful combination of facts which we have been reviewing is only as the prepared channel for our energies; the supply of energy can only come from a deep appreciation of the work itself. The proper advancement of human beings—the moral and social development of our freedmen—the promotion of human progress—the civilization of savage tribes—the elevation of our degraded humanity—the Christianization of Africa's dusky myriads—the leading of helpless souls to the Saviour of sinners—these are the motive powers, and as they are kept vivid and influential in the mind, so shall we be quick and effective in taking advantage of the swelling sympathies of the hour.

It specially behooves us to understand that a grander Gospel missionary enterprise there cannot be than is just this work of the Colonization Society. The field is ripe for the harvest. A mighty continent overspread by heathenism, with its habitations of cruelty, and by Mohammedanism, with its polygamy and slavery, calls aloud for the aggressive benevolence of Christendom. But the Christian Negro himself is the only effective missionary to his congeners in Africa, and a most effective missionary he is. Witness what has already been done in this direction by the small force in Liberia.

Our churches should awake to the conviction that a tremendous power for the gospel in Africa is *slumbering* in the Christian Negroes

of our country, and that, as the indispensable means to the end, they should enable the Colonization Society to call forth and apply that now slumbering power. We do not begin to appreciate this gigantic power which God has placed at our disposal. Permit me to sketch it for you. See that slave-boy. He was bartered for a horse and returned as an unfair exchange, and on two subsequent occasions was bartered for rum and tobacco. His spirit was then so broken that he tried to commit suicide. He was afterwards sold to Portuguese traders, rescued by an English vessel, converted to Christianity, educated and ultimately ordained, and was consecrated a Bishop. The parents from whom the slave had been wrenched in his childhood he met again after a separation of twenty-five years. His heathen relatives received from him their first knowledge of the Gospel, and his mother died under the roof of her son's Episcopal residence. He founded a notable mission, perhaps the most successful in the world. He has confronted heathen monarchs, and told them their sins. He has grappled with the slave trade, with cannibalism, with polygamy, with heathen ignorance, with Mohammedan fanaticism. More than once he has been captured and his life imperiled, but he still lives to preach the everlasting gospel; his work is a bright light in a dark place, his presence is a benediction to the wretched serfs of superstition, his gray hairs are a crown of glory. This is my sketch. Do you call me a sensational novelist? Nay, in this, as in other instances, truth is stranger than fiction. I have but given you a narrative of facts. It is the life of Samuel Crowther, the Negro Bishop of the Church of England, who was seized as a boy by a Mohammedan gang in 1821, went through all the vicissitudes detailed above, and established the great mission of which he now has charge, and of which the Secretary of this Society has written that "Christendom knows not of any other such mission as the Niger mission of the Church Missionary Society." Is this not a record of power? But is it anything more than as the bud to the blossom? For how many a Crowther, unconscious and unheeded, may be slumbering away among our freedmen? Ye friends of Christian enlightenment everywhere, ye believers in Jesus Christ in all the churches, awake, awake to the magnitude of the subject. Come up to the help of the Colonization Society in its efforts to transfer this gigantic power to where it is so much needed, and thus move onward with God Himself in this majestic march of His Providence. Give to the Society your sympathy, your moral support, your material aid, and say to her in strength-giving tones, and as well in deeds as in words, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!"





